

The areas most frequently assigned a rating of “area needing improvement” across all 41 states whose Child and Family Services Review reports have been released are:

Item	Number of states assigned a rating of area needing improvement
Assessing the needs and services of child, parents, and foster parents	40
Assessing mental health of child	37
Establishing the most appropriate permanency goal for the child	36
Demonstrating efforts to include child and family in caseload planning activities	36
Ensuring stability of foster care placements	35
Achieving a child's goal of adoption	35
Providing a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions	35
Ensuring workers conduct face-to-face visits with parent(s)	34
Providing services that are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the state's Child and Family Services Plan	31
Ensuring workers conduct face-to-face visits with child	31

Source: GAO analysis of the 41 states' final CFSR reports released through December 31, 2003.

Program Improvement Plans

- Average time to develop approved Program Improvement Plan was 180 days in 2001
- Average time to develop approved Program Improvement Plan was 134 days in 2002

Based on an analysis of 31 available state program improvement plans, the major strategies developed and the number of states including the strategy in their Program Improvement Plan are as follows:

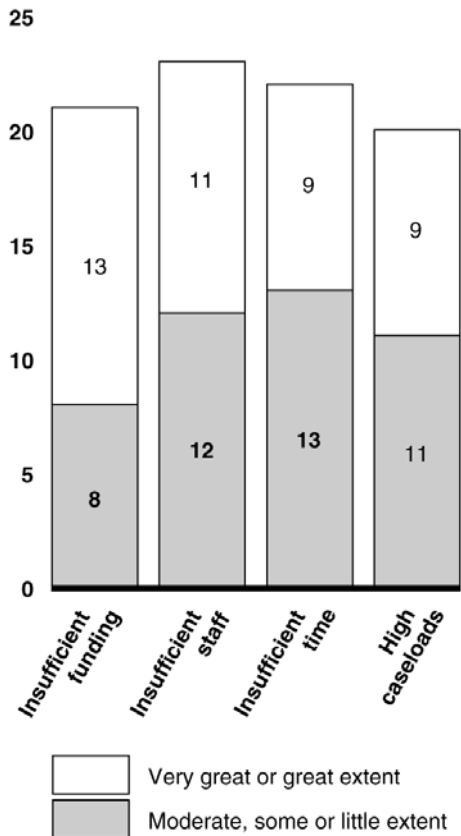
PIP strategy category	Description (number of states that included the strategy in their PIP)
Policies and procedures	<p>Review, modify, or develop/implement any policy, procedure, or case practice standard (31)</p> <p>Enhance foster home/parent licensing standards (7)</p> <p>Develop child and family assessment tools, such as protocols for risk/safety determinations (28)</p> <p>Identify and adopt any promising practices (19)</p>
Data collection and analysis	<p>Review and report on agency performance through self-assessments or internal audits/review (31)</p> <p>Apply federal CFSR or similar process for internal statewide case reviews (16)</p> <p>Improve information and data collection systems (31)</p>
Staff supports	<p>Train and develop caseworkers (through dissemination and training on policy or through revisions to overall curriculum) (30)</p> <p>Assess and monitor staff responsibilities, skills, or performance (24)</p> <p>Recruit additional staff/retain staff (14)</p> <p>Lower caseloads (11)</p> <p>Increase caseworker pay (1)</p>
Foster parent support/services and resources for children and families	<p>Train and develop foster families'/providers' skills and capacities (27)</p> <p>Recruit and retain foster families (22)</p> <p>Increase involvement of foster or birth families in case (18)</p> <p>Expand service array for children and families (includes developing or enhancing transportation systems to transport siblings and parents for visits, creating one-stop centers for assistance, modifying visitation services, and providing any additional support services) (27)</p> <p>Engage stakeholders such as courts, advocates, foster homes, private providers, or sister agencies in public sector, e.g., mental health (can include consultation, training, or formal partnering to improve services or placements) (31)</p> <p>Create or improve monitoring of contracts with private providers to enhance service delivery (includes development of performance based or outcome-based contracts or other evaluations of provider performance) (25)</p>
State legislative supports	State request for legislative action to support any of the above strategies (20)
Federal technical assistance	State request technical assistance from ACF or any resource center to support any of the above strategies (27)

Most Common Challenges Affecting the State's Program Improvement Plan Implementation

Based on General Accounting Office report of April 2004, the most common challenges affecting the ability of states to implement Program Improvement Plans were:

- Insufficient funding
- Insufficient staff
- Insufficient time
- High caseloads

Number of states reporting how much challenges affected PIP implementation



Source: GAO survey.

Source: GAO analysis.